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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 001373

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [KMDR](#) [NATO](#) [IR](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: TURKEY: EARLY REACTION IN THE MEDIA TO MISSILE
DEFENSE ANNOUNCEMENT

REF: STATE 095619

Classified By: DCM Doug Silliman for reason 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Turkish media reaction to the White House announcement on European missile defense has been limited thus far and ranged from straightforward reporting based on the Presidential announcement to speculation that the announcement portends a greater role for Turkey in the new "Phased, Adaptive Approach." Some of the media reporting focused on the positive Russian reaction to the announcement as well as reactions in the Czech Republic and Poland. The few Turkish pundits who have weighed in on the issue thus far have conflated the White House announcement with the recent, unrelated notification to Congress regarding a possible sale of U.S. air defense systems to Turkey. They were critical of the likely high cost of the missile system and questioned whether Turkey's acquisition of air defense capabilities or hosting of air defense assets under the new U.S. approach would upset Turkey's improving ties with Iran and Russia. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Initial media reaction to the White House announcement on European missile defense has been somewhat limited, likely due to a mix of the timing of the announcement, which took place late in the afternoon local time, ongoing coverage of the government's "Democratic Initiative" to address the Kurdish issue, and a media frenzy over the arrest yesterday of a teenage fugitive wanted in a sensational murder case. Turkey will celebrate the end of Ramadan for the coming four days, so media reaction will likely be slow to develop.

¶3. (SBU) Leading Turkish daily Hurriyet provided straightforward reporting on President Obama's announcement, and noted that this announcement coincided with the announcement of the Congressional notification of the USG intent to participate in Turkey's air defense system tender with the 7.8 billion USD Patriot Advanced Capability-3 (PAC-3) system. Vatan, another major daily, suggested that the participation of the Patriot system in the tender was linked to the new missile defense approach.

¶4. (SBU) Most media outlets speculated that Turkey will likely be asked to play a leading role in the new architecture. Mainstream daily Sabah headlines that "The Missile Defense Shield Is Sliding Straight Toward Turkey." Cumhuriyet, a leftist-nationalist daily, and the Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak drew from a Washington Post article which cited unnamed officials who said that anti-missile ships will be deployed to the Black Sea and Baltic Sea, while the missile shield will be built in Turkey according to the new strategy.

15. (SBU) In Turkey, newspaper columnists are widely read and are among the most influential opinion makers. Ercan Citlioglu, a contact for Consulate Istanbul and an influential academic questioned the need for a missile defense system in Turkey: "Turkey faces no threat from any neighbor... But in which direction will these weapons be stationed? The first country that comes to mind is Iran. Washington may consider Iran to be a rogue country, but it has in no way displayed any sign of enmity against its Turkish neighbors. Leading columnist Mehmet Ali Birand wrote that the threat against which these weapons will be directed is poorly defined, and declares that this step would be at odds with the government's policy to engage with Iran.

16. (SBU) Hurriyet's Sedat Laciner, the head of the International Strategic Research Organization (ISRO), an influential Ankara-based thinktank, speculated that U.S. willingness to supply the Patriot system was driven by its desire to stem Turkey's improving ties with Iran and Russia. The Hurriyet report also noted that other observers (not named) have suggested that Turkey's decision to acquire an air defense system was driven by a military at odds with the Justice and Development Party's zero-problem foreign policy approach. FM Davutoglu -- before the POTUS announcement missile defense announcement -- refuted this assertion, however, stating that the move to acquire new air defense capability was not directed at any state, but was rather the next stage in Turkey's military development.

17. (SBU) Other comments focused on the cost of Turkey's air
ANKARA 00001373 002 OF 002

defense acquisition in light of an economic downturn and the government's recent announcement of a large budget deficit. Hasan Koni, a professor of international relations at Istanbul's Bahcesehir University complained that, "The purchase is futile. We can build 70 universities in Turkey with that money.

Comment

18. (C) This story will gather momentum in the press once the Turkish chattering classes return from their four-day holiday to mark the end of Ramadan, but it is impossible to predict how Turkey's many pundits will come down on the issue. Most likely, they will be split on the issue, each trying to find a unique aspect of the issue on which to focus. We have been careful to highlight the president's point that we consulted with Allies before making this decision and that some of Turkey's main points were taken into account. The government will be under pressure from opinion leaders to resist joining in efforts which Iran will interpret as threats. While Turkey's military recognizes the threat of a nuclear-armed Iran, Turkey's civilian leaders will be keeping their eyes fixed on domestic public opinion. Regular, high-level engagement will be essential if we are to ask Turkey to play a leading role in this effort.

JEFFREY

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